

Organization and Guidance of
Consumer Committees of
Local Councils of Defense



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The Consumer Committee of The Local Council of Defense



FOREWORD

The Local Council of Defense is the official agency in Pennsylvania by which the people of each community may provide protection for themselves in the present national emergency. Its program covers a wide range of activities, the purpose of which is to protect the people, their homes, their jobs, their property and their morale.

Each Local Council of Defense includes in its program the activities of a Consumer Committee, because the consumer's problems are vital to the well-being and morale of every community in the State.

This bulletin contains suggestions intended to assist the Consumer Committee of a Local Council of Defense to plan and carry out its part in the civilian defense program.

The Committee which has prepared the suggestions in this bulletin is comprised of men and women who believe in the traditional American way of life, and who realize how important it is at this time of national peril that the people in every community should feel that they are being dealt with fairly and honestly in all matters pertaining to the necessities of food, clothing, and rent.

The Committee has worked hard to make these suggestions very practical and useful, so that the Consumer Committee of a Local Council of Defense can be given a definite, sensible, and helpful program to carry out in their community.

If your Consumer Committee wishes any special help or guidance, please ask the State Council of Defense for it and we will try to send a field organizer to assist you.

A. C. MARTS
Executive Director

CONSUMER COMMITTEES OF LOCAL COUNCILS OF DEFENSE



Total defense requires the protection of living standards against excessive increases in living costs and the strengthening of living standards wherever these are dangerously low. The committee in the preparation of this bulletin realizes fully its inability to anticipate the many and varied problems each local Consumer Committee will face. It is, therefore, of vital importance that each local Consumer Committee be made up of alert and progressive citizens who are willing to accept the challenge.

This bulletin deals primarily and briefly with suggestions for:

1. The make-up of a local Consumer Committee.
2. A Consumer Information Center.
3. Carrying out programs in the local area.
4. Source materials.

I. Information regarding the Consumer Committee of a local Council of Defense.

A. How shall a consumer Committee be formed?

The Consumer Committee shall be appointed by the chairman of the Local Council of Defense.

B. Who should be members of the Consumer Committee?

The membership of the Consumer Committee shall be fully representative and technically competent. Therefore, this committee should consist of:

1. *Chairman* with experience in the consumer field either as economist, home economist, educator, leader in a consumer organization, or public official administering a consumer protection program.
2. Members drawn from the churches, labor and professional groups, schools, and women's organizations. In addition, this committee should be checked to see that the major income, occupation, racial, and nationality groups are represented.
3. Technically competent personnel, either as advisers or members of the committee, who are familiar with specific consumer problems such as food, housing, clothing, price, quality, and living standards.
4. Public officials, either as advisers or members, who are engaged in administering consumer programs, e.g., commissioners of markets, state food and drug officials, surplus commodities administrator, weights and measure inspectors, member of housing authority, etc.

C. What are the duties of the Consumer Committee?

A Consumer Committee of the Local Council of Defense is responsible for:

1. The conservation and efficient use of our resources.
2. The protection and strengthening of living standards of the community.
3. The establishment of a relationship and cooperation with public agencies, such as boards of education, health departments, bureaus of markets, public libraries, etc., which are in existence and whose regular functions include, or can include, consumer activities.
4. The assistance of groups such as welfare organizations, women's clubs, parent-teacher organizations, labor and professional organizations, etc., who are carrying on activities for their members and for the community on projects affecting living standards and promoting conservation.

D. What are the activities of the Consumer Committee?

For most practical results, a Consumer Committee should, if possible, set up Information Centers from which to carry on its activities.

II. What is the Consumer Information Center to do?

The Consumer Information Center will make available to the community:

1. Information
 - a. The problems of the defense program as they affect civilian living.
 - b. The need of conserving materials which are limited.
 - c. Specific consumer defense programs such as community canning, summer buying of coal, etc.
 - d. Price, quality, and wise buying of goods.
 - e. Efficient use and care of goods.
 - f. Home planning and budgeting to maintain basic living standards while making necessary adjustments.
 - g. Community resources to meet consumer needs.
 - h. Community programs to safeguard living standards.
 - i. Other government programs of help to consumers in understanding and meeting their problems and in participating in defense.
 - j. Government pamphlets and other materials relating to consumer problems.
 - k. Display of educational and informational posters, charts, etc.

2. Protection

- a. Someone to hear consumer complaints and their reports of ways in which they are being affected by the defense program.
- b. Persons familiar with community resources for consumer protection who will direct them to the use of those resources.
- c. Persons familiar with consumer problems who will advise consumers on ways to meet these problems.
- d. Such space as may be desired for, and the encouragement of demonstrations, study groups, discussions, committee meetings to plan consumer defense activities.

(a special bulletin is being prepared regarding Consumer Information Centers.)

III. Establishment of consumer programs dealing with community problems.

The following suggestions are general ones and will need to be adapted to the needs of particular communities. They are not exhaustive. Special local needs will suggest other consumer problems than those discussed here.

A. Food Programs

1. Take steps to insure full use of community food supplies. Vegetables and fruits go to waste each year in many localities. Such waste should be prevented. This may involve a community canning project, with the canned foods distributed through such channels as the school lunch program or community kitchens.
2. Support such programs as school lunch, food stamp plan and low cost milk, and, where necessary, expand them.
3. Establish municipal radio market news services to help consumers on each day's best food buys.
4. Encourage the use of government grades which enable consumers to purchase the quality best suited to their needs.
5. Plan and carry on special demonstrations on the selection and preparation of low cost protective foods.

B. Clothing Programs

In addition to the problem of choosing, buying, and caring of clothing, one of the most serious problems resulting from increased costs is the relation between quality and price. Consumers should be informed:

1. That certain articles of clothing already possess factual information about grades and performance.
2. That other commodities will be so labeled if consumers request it.

C. Price Problems

The problem of prices, especially rising prices is an important part in the development of all programs of consumption including food, housing, and clothing.

1. The Consumer Committee should make itself responsible for knowing the price situation of commodities about which the consumer complaints are received. It should be prepared to inform consumers whether price increases observed locally are general throughout the country or peculiar to the locality. Where a local price appears to be out of line, they should investigate the reasons and take steps to correct the situation.
2. Secure and disseminate information on the supplies of consumer goods so that consumers may not be induced to pay high prices because of supposed shortages where none exist.
3. Assist consumers to avoid panicky buying; to avoid buying scarce items and find the best substitutes; to conserve scarce products.
4. Discourage the use of scare advertising and selling practices, which may help to cause inflationary price rises.
5. Watch for possible hidden price rises, such as smaller container sizes or quantities, short weighing and measuring and quality deterioration.
6. Work for the wider use in local stores of graded products and of labels describing the contents of cans, packages, and the characteristic materials.
7. Encourage local consumer-retailer councils to consider cooperation on the problem of quality information, labeling, conservation of materials, substitutes and other vital problems.

D. State and Local Regulations Programs

1. Check state laws and local regulations, and enforcement of regulations, relating to small loans. See that people know how much installment buying and the use of retail credit costs them in actual dollars. Assist them in conforming to defense regulations relating to consumer credit. This is important where consumer incomes must be stretched, or over time pay leads to unusual types of expenditures.
2. Where trade barriers interfere with health, rapid movement of supplies, or otherwise unduly restrictive operation, the Consumer Committee should work for the passage of model laws to eliminate such barriers.

IV. Governmental Consumer Services

Committees will find that their municipalities are regularly offering certain services to consumers. These may include the regulation of food and drug quality, the regulation of weights and measures, the maintenance of municipal markets, and the regulation of prices of certain specific commodities such as gas and electricity. The State provides similar services. These should be studied and publicized so that consumers may know what protection is afforded them by their State and Local governments. The enforcement and adequacy of laws protecting consumers—such as food and drugs, or weights and measures laws—should be checked. The Federal government provides a variety of consumer services. As the defense program progresses, they will become increasingly important to consumers.

A. Federal

- 1 The Consumer Division of the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply is the defense agency responsible for consumer defense programs at the national level. The Consumer Division:
 - a. Represents the consumer interest in national defense policy.
 - b. Maintains a field staff to advise and assist consumer committees of state and local Councils of Defense and organizations in consumer programs.
 - c. Publishes educational and program material designed to assist individual consumers and groups of consumers to participate in the defense program.
 - d. Publishes a semi-monthly bulletin, CONSUMER PRICES, to keep consumers informed of the prices and supplies of commodities.
2. It is the special responsibility of the Consumer Division to serve Consumer Committees of state and local Defense Councils. Committees should bring to the attention of the Division any situations in which it may be of assistance. Address:

Consumer Division, Office of Price Administration
and Civilian Supply, 6th and Independence Ave-
nue, S. W. Washington, D. C.
3. Selected Source Materials (from Consumer Division)
 - a. CONSUMER PRICES
 - b. CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE BUILDS DEFENSE
(a selected bibliography of available pamphlet materials)
 - c. DIRECTORY OF GOVERNMENTAL CON-
SUMER SERVICES AND AGENCIES

B. State

1. Pennsylvania State Council of Defense

There exists a Consumer Advisory Committee to the State Council of Defense which will:

- a. Assist in the development of solutions of those consumer problems which are general throughout the state.
- b. Prepare and distribute additional information to assist local Consumer Committees.
- c. Provide a speakers bureau from which speakers may be procured to speak on various phases of the consumer program.

2. Pennsylvania State College

- a. The Ellen H. Richards Institute has the following helps available for those carrying on classes or discussion groups:

- (1) Realistic food models with charts explaining the major contributions of the chief items in the diet. (Loan or gift through the courtesy of the Work Projects Administration)
- (2) Colored kodachrome slides on various consumer commodities. (Loan after October 15, 1941)
- (3) Bulletin (160 pages) giving an annotated bibliography of source material on ultimate consumer goods. Price 40 cents. (Available after October 15, 1941)
- (4) Speakers for conferences or lectures on foods and nutrition, housing, clothing, and consumer education in general.

- b. The Extension Library

- (1) Offers reference service on consumer problems.
- (2) Publications are gathered on specialized fields of consumer education and grouped by subject.
- (3) A list of these specialized subjects is made available and is kept up to date by supplements.
- (4) A small handling charge and postage both ways are all that is required of an individual or group wishing to use this service.
- (5) The material may be borrowed for two weeks, excluding time in transit.
- (6) This material consists of bulletins, pamphlets, books, and charts.

- c. Agricultural Home Economics Extension
 - (1) The Agricultural Home Economics Extension Service has been conducting an extension program in Consumer Education for some years and will continue to stress this program.
 - (2) The extension service will furnish any information it can, to all groups interested in consumer problems.
 - (3) The Department of Home Economics of the Pennsylvania State College is also one of the four sources through which these groups may receive help.
- 3. Pennsylvania Nutrition Council
 - a. The function of the Nutrition Council is to co-ordinate the work of all agencies and organizations interested and active in the field of health and nutrition in the State.
 - b. Membership of Nutrition Council: Representatives of civic, social and service groups; and leaders in the fields of medicine, dentistry, nursing, social work, education, and public health.
 - c. The program of the Nutrition Council is primarily educational and includes:
 - (1) Nutrition outlines for group study.
 - (2) Refresher courses in nutrition for professional and lay leaders.
 - (3) Bibliographies.
 - (4) Exhibits.
 - (5) Discussion leaders.
 - (6) Special lecturers.
 - d. Local Nutrition Committees have been organized in many communities to survey nutrition needs and develop an action program for improving the nutrition status of defense workers, children, and families in the area.
- 4. Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
 - a. Bureau of Markets.
 - b. Bureau of Foods and Chemistry.
- 5. Pennsylvania Department of Health
 - a. Bureau of Inspection.
 - b. Bureau of Public Health Education.
 - c. Bureau of Communicable Diseases.
 - d. Bureau of Milk Control.
 - e. Bureau of Drug Control and Laboratory Work.
 - f. Bureau of Nursing.
 - g. Bureau of Child Health.

6. Other State agencies and organizations can be of assistance according to their respective functions.

C. Local

One of the first jobs of a local Consumer Committee is to acquaint itself and, in turn, the consumers with the many services offered by various local agencies and organizations.

However, one such agency found in every community is the public school. The Consumer Committee can render valuable service to the defense program by encouraging consumer instruction within the public school.

